

1609/513.

LETTER
FROM
RUSTICUS,
TO A
Young Member
OF THE
IRISH HOUSE OF COMMONS.

“ If the closest bonds of Union are become necessary, are these
“ bonds to be clapped on by cajoling and bribery, by intimidation
“ and violence?—Remembering all she has suffered under your
“ dominion, can Ireland so soon cast away a cherished Independence, yet not twenty Years old, in exchange for two thirteenth’s
“ of your Representation, which must inevitably lay her at your
“ feet, with the privilege only of telling her miseries as often as
“ they may demand utterance, and holding at your mercy the
“ means of alleviating them.”

CARTWRIGHT on the English
Constitution.

CORK:

PRINTED BY JAMES HALY, BOOKSELLER, KING’S-ARMS,
EXCHANGE.

1800.



edT

LA

MY DEAR FRIEND,

AS you must be persuaded that you and your family will ever hold in my recollection a much endeared' and foremost place, and for whose reputation, happiness, and honor, I am equally inrerested as for my own, you doubtless, will impute mv writing to you at present to the purest motives ; if the opinions be erroneous, which I submit to you, you will attribute them to the want of information, or failure in judgment or abilities, and not to any wish to pervert your principles, or mislead your understanding.

The momentous question of the Union will immediately come under consideration; the last sesson of parliament, you and were ranked among those, who were justly celebrated, let their motives be what they may, as the intrepid defenders of the constitutional independence of Ireland. Not doubting either of your consistency or integrity, yet aware, how many fascinating allurements, and insidious arguments will be held out, I wish to call your attention to the real value of the one, and to the intrinsic weight of the other.

The opposition to the Union last session was founded on its *principle*, as that only was before parliament; that principle must always be the same, viz. that Ireland would surrender her legislative independence, should she agree to the measure, and that parliament is not competent to such a surrender---this no time can alter, no allurements reconcile, no barter compensate; as it rests on the immutable basis of right, of justice, and of liberty. Those who shall abandon the principle, hazard not only their consistency, but their integrity and honor. The detail or terms of this proposed Union, to those *only* who might have supposed parliament competent to the measure, may be a plea for its farther consideration; but even those, who shall view it in that light, will not see the prospect so very flattering. Supposing that it should be proposed, that the markets of Great-Britain and Ireland should be as accessible to each other, as those of York and London, can any person assert with truth, that Ireland is at this moment unable to acquiesce under such a plausible *equality* of commercial and manufacturing intercourse? if she is not able, the connection would be destructive; if she is able, a commercial treaty, as formerly with



not with France, the natural enemy of Great-Britain, would effect it, without a surrender at either side of national independence.

The limited range of a letter will not suffer me to dilate much, but as I go on, let me remark, that the want of capital, of skill, of ships, of machinery, and of local attachments, would instantly render the equality of intercourse ruinous and destructive. But, to countervail these disadvantages, it is said, British capital and industry, would in consequence of an Union, be transmitted hither. Never was any expectation more futile or ridiculous. It has never been the genius or the disposition of large capitalists to emigrate from England: they, like the industrious bees, roam to, collect the sweets of every country, but it is, that they might return laden to deposit them in their own hive. Look at the increasing commerce and manufactures of Great-Britain at this moment; I ask you, whether you think they want any new stimulus, or any change of situation, to multiply their capitals, or encrease their sphere of industry.

If the field of industry in England be still open and unbounded, surely the manners, habits,

habits, customs, climate, language, and order of Ireland, will be no inducements for emigration.

But, what an abject, listless, and hopeless country must that be, which looks to foreign capitals or foreign industry to multiply or excite her own! What country are we acquainted with, which owes its permanent prosperity to such adventitious aid! Look towards the sterl and scanty foil and unhealthful climate of Holland; did she owe her commercial aggrandizement to such means? Is the unrivalled constitutional and commercial greatness of England to be attributed to the introduction of foreign capital or foreign industry? No----in order to insure prosperity, a country must depend on her own capital, her labor, her activity, her climate, her foil, her population, and on her spirit of liberty. What more then has Ireland to wish for, possessed, I might say, of all these advantages, with great bodily and mental strength? View the West Indies, that part of the globe where British capital is solely employed in carrying on its commerce; what is, even at this day, the state of its progressive improvement? Islands, most favoured by nature for their prolific foil and ripening climate, rest solely for their

their support on the comparatively spontaneous produce of both ; they are prohibited from manufactures of every kind, from intercourse, with any other countries, but those which Great-Britain shall prescribe ; left to sink under the pressure of indolence, disease and luxury, surrounded by thousands of wretched slaves, torn from the bosom of their families, friends, and country, to administer to the voluptuousness of their task-masters, and to the support of British monopoly.

Let us look back to our financial situation-- Ireland owes about twelve millions ; the debt of England is about six hundred millions, of which, should an Union take place, we must in a certain proportion participate, consequently in all the taxes, internal and external. What think you of such a co-partnership!! Recollect, that our capacity for bearing such a burthen would, on the adoption of the Union, be instantly diminished. One million at least, would be the annual and additional drain of the absentees ; a capital that heretofore was multiplied *ad infinitum* in promoting and encouraging the labor and industry of our country.

It

It is a necessary though a painful duty, to call to recollection what has hitherto been the conduct of Great-Britain to this country. It has been to divide the people, and thus to render her an easy conquest to peculation and jobbing. If such hath been the usage when Ireland had a government and parliament within herself, and that British ministers could only act in an occult manner, to what mischief must this country be exposed, when responsibility shall be farther removed; when she will have chiefly to depend on the moderation of ministers, and the favourable disposition of a parliament, in which she will only have a proportion of one to five, and which has long been habituated to withhold from her colonies and dependencies an equal share of that liberty, of which she boasts the possession. You know full well, the prejudices that at this moment prevail in Great-Britain against this kingdom; looking back no farther than the period of the revolution of 1688, she has ever beheld us as rivals in trade, manufactures, and constitution; and hath shewn not only the inclination, but usurped the power, to depress our exertions, commercial or constitutional.

Though

Though it has hitherto been too much the policy of Great Britain to outwit, to circumvent, and to sacrifice this country to her schemes of avarice, monopoly, and aggrandisement, yet it is to be hoped, that a more liberal system will soon prevail; and though sensible as we must be of our wrongs, I trust, no influence or power whatever will operate to cause our separation; on the contrary, I fervently hope, that while a wreck of England remain that we shall adhere to it; but let it not be the adherence of slaves to their masters, but the attachment of freemen to their equals.

It has been said, that in the united parliament we shall be better protected than heretofore; to this I answer, that, if the British minister possessed such an influential power in our own parliament, composed of 300 members, having an ostensible part to act, how increased must it become, operating on a lesser number, so much farther removed from observance and responsibility; in whose election the aristocratic interest would chiefly preponderate; the expences of contested elections rising in proportion to the magnitude of the object, to which must be added the expences of emigrations, all operating to render the Irish members more ^{ignorant} B prone

prone to corruption, and whose objects in consideration of their comparative weakness in numbers, as well as circumstances, must be more personal than national : from these considerations, we must conclude, that we should abandon in some measure, self-defence, and would have to rely on the casual and fortuitous chance of the protection of others, ignorant of our situation, and indifferent about our interest.

The hackneyed argument, that an Union would tend to tranquilize the country, deserves only to be mentioned, that it may be the more despised ; without the aid of Union, and under the ferment which the agitation of the question creates, yet, exclusive of that consideration, we daily see tranquillity and good order returning ; and when the favourable conjuncture of peace shall happen, Ireland, and not perfectly till then, will once more enjoy the blessings of security, and of obedience to the laws.

A man who values his reputation as an inestimable jewel ; who has a character to lose, or a character to make, should well consider what inducements ministers can hold out to prevail on him, if not convinced by fair argument and reason, to change his

his mind, abandon his principles, or hazard his fame. The minister can bestow places of emolument; but within our own observation in this country, who are the place-men, whose expences have not increased in proportion to their situation, and on an average, by these adventitious aids (paradoxically speaking,) have not rather impaired than improved their fortunes? Besides, is it by any means certain, that beyond a rational competency, an encreased degree of wealth contributes to human happiness? But, the temporary acquisitions under government are of their own nature the most insignificant; they are precarious, uncertain, and subordinate to the will of others; they are often the wages of iniquity; and to qualify one-self for such acquirements, one must often flee from his conscience, and prostitute his talents. The honors, that government have to bestow for parliamentary services, are as little to be valued as the emoluments. It was a good adage 2000 years ago, that "*Virtus est vera nobilitas*," in these times, the observation ought to be no less forcible. If the Union should be carried, how much would Irish titles be depreciated; a few aristocratic chieftains only would have seats in the united parliament; on the whole, to any rational man, how little

ought the expectation of lucrative employments, or titled preferments to weigh against the peace of conscience, or the dignity of character. However, I hope, it will not be inferred, I meant to insinuate, that places of trust and emolument under government, or those honors which it is the prerogative of the crown to confer, should not be filled, or accepted of by men of rank, fortune, or character; on the contrary, this description, if they possess talents, appear to be best suited for such places, and the proper objects for such distinguished marks of royal favor. The bare acceptance of them, therefore, cannot be deemed dishonorable or degradatory; in themselves, they tend to create a more ardent interest in the public service; and often excite emulation towards the attainment of national glory. But what I wish to impress on your youthful mind is, that if the means to acquire them should be a dereliction of private consistency, or a violation of public faith, then they become in value not only truly insignificant, but should be spurned at with contempt, and rejected with indignity.

There are some representatives for counties placed in an awkward situation, who have voted against the Union, a part of whose constituents

constituents have since instructed them to vote for it, and unfortunately it has so happened, that these very representatives pledged themselves at their election to obey instructions. In that case, I think it is their duty to adopt every possible means of acquiring the real sentiments of the great body of the electors; and though a certain portion of them met and instructed, yet if others were uncollected and *publicly* silent, they are not to deem the instructions as conclusive evidence of the general acquiescence or unanimity. Whatever promises representatives make to their constituents should be adhered to with attention and respect; but in all promises or contracts of this kind, there is always something between the parties implied as well as expressed, and therefore should be construed fairly and liberally. In making such contracts it could not have been supposed, that representatives would be instructed to annihilate the monarchy, a part of the constitution, much less to annihilate the constitution itself. It could not be suspected, that constituents would instruct them to elect the members of the Commons House from among that House; to vote themselves perpetual, or various other such absurdities or political impossibilities. These questions being never implied

plied or understood, and to such as the legislative functions or powers were never thought to extend, (and more particularly the case of the Union,) no obligation can be supposed to exist, nor no breach of contract consequently can be inferred. A representative may also be threatened by one party, that they would oppose him at the next election, if he did not vote for the Union; by another, if he did so, that they also would oppose; these threats ought not to deter him from what he thought right, as he may be assured, that either of the menacing parties, if they found it their particular interest, would equally oppose, let him act how he may.---The representative should recollect and act under that old adage:

“ *Justum et tenacem propositi Virum,*
 “ *Non Civium ardor prava jubentium,*
 “ *Non Voltus instantis tyranni,*
 “ *Mente qualit Solida.*”

In case his constituents rejected him, he ought to consider from what cares and anxieties, vexations and disappointments he would be released; what consolation he would receive from an approving conscience; the carefles of his real friends; in the bosom of his family; in the solid gratifications of domestic society, disengaged

ed from the turbulence of faction, and not haunted by the airy phantoms of ambition or avarice.

Let us remember, it was resolved in Dublin, that a column should be erected in some conspicuous part of that city, on which should be engraven the names of the *One Hundred and Eleven* members who voted against the Union, in order to perpetuate their fame and patriotism. Another column, I hope, will not be necessary, on which to inscribe the names of the apostates to hand down, (as was the Athenian mode,) the infamy, as well as the virtues of mankind; the one to excite emulation, the other to deter from ignoble conduct. You my dear friend, are a young man just entering into life, with the fairest expectations; with an inheritance from your forefathers, not only of a good fortune, but of a good and honest name; you came into parliament at a most momentous period; you had an opportunity of engaging in a successful struggle for the independence of your country----fully not the splendor of the victory; persevere and fear not---“*macte virtutem*,” so shall you not dishonour your name, disgrace your family, or degrade your country. Remember, that if one ax-

iom be questioned, mathematical science drops to the ground ; if one constitutional right be usurped or destroyed, our security in the rest becomes precarious and unstable : if you give up the shield, you may present the bearer with the spear.

It may be asked, by what causes the prosperity of this country has been retarded ? In my opinion, they are these : the rights of conquest, and consequent forfeitures ; the feuds, the animosities, the divisions, the bigotry of one sect, and the illiberality of the other ; the commercial and constitutional restraints to establish, to promote, to foment, to impose, and continue, all of which, England gave her artful as well as energetic exertions ; but these causes are daily decreasing, and in proportion as they cease, the effects will vanish. It must be acknowledged, that many respectable bodies, and individuals, since last sessions of parliament, have declared in favor of the Union ; but to wave the small proportion of property and numbers, which they bear to those, who unequivocally have decided against it, because, such a controversy would lead to frivolous and partial disputation, more than to the establishment of general facts. For my part, I always respect

those, who, in their judgment, are most equal and impartial, and who have no living biases.

those, who differ, as well as those, who agree with me, provided the conduct of both appears to be actuated by fair motives; and this induces me to consider, how the signatures in favor of the Union were chiefly obtained.

The representative of majesty, attended by the most popular supporters of his administration; a Nobleman, whose character has hitherto been unimpeached; to whom in India, honors have been decreed, and statues erected; condescended to become throughout the kingdom, the personal advocate of the measure: his presence was sufficient to overawe the timid and the ignorant, to ensnare the incautious, to seduce the open-hearted, and to rally in the cause, all the retainers and dependants of government. The object of the journey appeared as not intended to challenge calm discussion, but by partial and personal applications to promote addressers, agreed to without inquiry, and offered without consideration. Among the addressers, a *certain** portion of the Catholics of the south stood conspicuous; but let not blame be attached

C to

* Let it not be forgotten, that a numerous and respectable part of the Catholics of the city of Cork, joined with their Protestant brethren, at an early period to express their public disapprobation of the Union, from which, neither influence nor power could prevail on them to retract.

to them---If they withheld their names they feared, lest they might be branded as disloyal, or stigmatized as rebellious ; bending under insults and long depression, they possess no public mind---it was not for them, to discriminate between their attachment to individuals rising into *power*, and their duty to their country sinking into a province. To them, the general deprivation of national independence might appear, but as a more equal distribution of wrongs and degradation! I am also confident, that the strongest motive which actuate many worthy characters to support the Union, is the expectation, that it will destroy the overshadowing influence of the aristocracy ; but for that, there seems no solid foundation. The aristocracy at this moment, not only possess the borough-interest, but in almost every county and city of the south, and in many of the north, have a preponderating influence. When deprived of, or curtailed in their boroughs, and when parliamentary interest shall every day become a greater object, it is natural to suppose, that their exertions will be redoubled not only to retain, but to add to their political domination ; and in proportion as their powers shall be compressed, their elasticity will be increased ; in that event,

event, their influence will be more dangerous, and its effects more fatal to the remaining privileges of their country-men.

I have written this letter for the purpose of drawing your attention closer to this important subject than it possibly might be, had I been silent. In my hurry, I fear that I have not sufficiently adhered to the order or arrangement of my arguments, much less to elegance of language, or correctness of style: time pressed too closely for attempts of that kind, and as it was originally only intended for your's and your family's perusal, I was not solicitous to obtain literary approbation---more particularly, as I was persuaded, that good intentions would have their full weight with you, and that you was convinced, in all my public conduct, I never had but one object---the public good; which consideration in my retired state, and as years advance, supplies an inward satisfaction capable of softening all the casual asperities of life.

I now deem it my duty to recapitulate the subjects, to which in the discussion of the question, I wish you particularly to attend. That those, who voted last session against the *principle* of an Union, could not, with

consistency vote for it at any period, particularly at this. That, however liberal the terms might be, they would be dangerous to accept of under such circumstances; but may, and ought to be obtained by a commercial treaty, without sacrificing at either side constitutional rights. That, judging from past experience and the present situation of England, the idea of British capitalists settling here is vain and illusive. That, the immediate additional drain occasioned by absentees would not be compensated, even were large capitalists to come over. That, the chief cause of the retardment of Irish prosperity is, in some measure, to be attributed to the weak and bad policy of England towards it. That, in an united parliament, Ireland would have less power to defend herself, or to ameliorate her situation, than she had heretofore. That, it ought also to be recollect^d, that if an Union should be effected, it would be irrevocable; and should its consequence be ever so destructive, that recourse to arms would be the only means of redress; a desperate and dubious alternative! ultimately ruinous to this country, hazarding the security of England, and probably throwing us into the hands of France; the overweening and implacable enemy of both. That,

a kingdom

a kingdom like this, owing but little, uniting with one whose debt is enormous, appears to be a tremendous speculation. That, the commercial aggrandisement of any country is not to be traced to the influx of foreign capital, or foreign labor, for the purpose of carrying on its trade or manufactures. That, Ireland is in every relative situation as happily placed, and as likely to be prosperous, when once peace shall be established, as any other country. That, on due consideration of the emoluments and titles, which government have to bestow, they are but paltry allurements to a mind that will firmly investigate their real value; and but poor inducements for a representative to sacrifice the integrity of his character, or the independance of his native land. That, the engagements of representatives to their constituents should be construed liberally; and that, no contracts can be binding, the terms of which are not particularly expressed, or supposed to be at the time of making within the ordinary routine of duty; also within the accustomary and constitutional powers entrusted to the representative. I wish to impress deeply on your youthful mind, that what is repugnant to the constitution cannot be law; and as we are on that subject, I will give you

you a sketch of my opinion as to the British constitution well administered. Early habits of education, a life of leisure, and some observation have strongly impressed me with the highest veneration for it, and to its principles I will ever adhere. It is a constitution, that appears to be a combination of three distinct powers, whose tendency is supposed to be directed to the same end, the public good; and whose concurrent force gives regular movement to the political machine; a constitution under whose influence Property, Life, and Liberty are defended and protected against violence, rapacity, and usurpation: well adapted, therefore, to diffuse equality of Justice, and equality of Rights, through different ranks, gradations, and orders in Society; under whose protection, talents and virtues are fostered, rewarded, and honored. I consider it as containing an internal balm to heal its own wounds, and capable without convulsion of being ameliorated, improved, and reformed by the progressive wisdom of mankind; the solid piles, on which this venerable fabric stands, are the rights and consent of the people, whose controlling energy and superintending influence are the invigorating principles, which through ages have preserved it, and if duly recognised
and

and applied, must render it imperishable. From this source, all laws ought to flow as the streams of life from the heart of man, and in all deviations should be traced back to this fountain of vitality.---When Britain rose from the main, she caught this as her charter, and wove it in her web of empire; to that charter, and that constitution, Ireland has an equal right with Great-Britain; for the Irish, as well as the English, the Barons struggled, and the Tyrant bowed.---In the reign of Henry the 7th, Ireland adopted it; she claimed and asserted it at various periods since; at the revolution of 1688; at the capitulation of Limerick, she covenanted for it; in 1782, the spirit of her parliament and people wrested it from usurpation; and I trust, their virtue will yet preserve it.

E N D.

